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# Star Spokesman

## David Gergen: White House 'Action Addict' on the Rise

By Elisabeth Bumiller

David Gergen is gulping, grabbing the podium in the White House press room, eyes wide in anticipation of the next trap to be laid. There are plenty. It's 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, just hours after CIA deputy director Max Hugel resigned following accusations of improper stock market practices. This is a problem for the administration, and particularly for the man who hired Hugel, CIA Director William J. Casey. As far as the press goes, Casey is undercover for the day.

So Gergen, barely a month into his new job as White House spokesman, is presiding at the first acute embarrassment of the Reagan administration. On a sluggish summer day, it's the biggest news in town.

The reporters want more.

Q: "Did the president ask him to resign?"

Q: "What is the president's view of Bill Casey's judgment in the Hugel matter?"

Q: "Is there any concern that the agency was compromised?"

Q: "Would he have been fired if he didn't resign?"

Gergen fences back, giving some but never too much. He wrinkles his brow, hitches up his trousers, intently chews the ice in his glass of tea. He's a chronic twitcher. Sometimes, he stares off into the distance, soberly pondering a question.

Q: "Do you wish the administration, or Mr. Casey, had known of these allegations earlier?"

Gergen: "Well, I suppose in some ways we all wish the whole thing could have come up in a way which could have been dealt with in ahh, ahh, in ahh... in a way which provided him what he wanted, which was a chance to, to, well, ahh... I wouldn't say that." He has caught himself in time. He smiles, the victor. And then adds: "Let's not wander down that path."

Reporters laugh. Gergen grins, intensity gone for just half a beat. You can see that he likes it, this daily cat-and-mou

veteran who's now on the A team—Ronald Reagan's new communications chief and packager of ideas.

Here's how he packages himself:

"There are two or three angles you could play," he has said earlier, earnestly and helpfully. "The story, that I would suggest is that this is the kind of person who has been there before. Why would anybody possibly want to do this a second time? That's a good question."

He has others. "You know, is this guy really a White House junkie? That kind of thing. You know, what's going on here? Is he crazy?"

In a White House dominated by cool Californians, David Gergen sticks out like a cowlick on a smooth head of hair. He is taller than the rest of them anyway, standing a gawky 6 feet 5 inches in the sensible gray suits he is adept at wrinkling. He attracts clutter, particularly the 10 newspapers he tries to get through each day. His wife won't let them pile up at home and his secretary won't let them pile up at the office, so he makes do with his ailing Volkswagen. The front seat, stacked frighteningly high, is unfit for human transport.

At 39, Gergen is a three-time White House aide-de-camp from the Nixon and Ford presidencies, a fidgety, personable workaholic who has a reputation around political Washington as a decent sort who doesn't crush toes. He has a loud laugh, "AH HAH HAH," and a studied naivete, both fronts for his political sophistication. "I'm just a country lawyer," he grins. "What do you mean?"

Gergen is White House press secretary in all but title. He guides the White House press office as well as the communications and speech-writing operations—duties he'd unofficially assumed after White House Press Secretary James S. Brady was wounded in the March 30 assassination attempt on the president. Although he's disorganized and forever late ("Some people are that way,"

James A. Baker III), the phrase most often attached to Gergen these days is "rising star."

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Reagan told Gergen on June 16 that he was naming him communications chief, a promotion that made Larry Speakes the principal in the press office and Gergen the media man—overseeing Speakes. It also leaves the press secretary job open for James Brady, still recuperating from brain surgery at George Washington University Medical Center.

Before the assassination attempt that wounded Brady, Gergen had been staff director under James Baker, a job created in the Carter White House to offset the disorganization of Hamilton Jordan. But Baker is a good administrator, and Gergen found himself with an amorphous role. He evolved into one high-access adviser who had the time and inclination to return reporters' phone calls.

After the assassination attempt, an administration source says, the White House considered naming a new press secretary. The possibilities included deputy chief of staff Mike Deaver, Speakes, political director Lynn Nofziger and Gergen. The announcement was delayed until Brady was out of danger, and by then, it had been refined to the current setup.

Gergen likes it. "When you're at the center of action," he says, "you see people at their best and worst. You see people striving at the outermost limits of their capabilities."

Yesterday's press briefing, for instance. The Hugel matter again.

Q: "Was there an FBI security check on him?"

Gergen: "There was not an FBI security check. My understanding is that there was a background check on him, conducted by the CIA, which was extensive."

Gergen grins broadly, playing the irony for its humor. Reporters laugh. He's won again.